

CHAPTER 24

UNDER THE PROVIDENCE OF MR. GANDHI

(I) His work through the Congress

I. A Strange Welcome. II. The Great Repudiation. III. A Charge Sheet. IV. The Basis of the Charge Sheet. V. The Tragedy of Gandhi. VI. His Legacy to India and the Untouchables.

On the 28th December 1931, Mr. Gandhi returned to India from London where he had gone as a delegate to attend the second Session of the Indian Round Table Conference. At the Round Table Conference, Mr. Gandhi had been an utter, ignominious failure both as a personality and as a politician. I know that my opinion will not be accepted by the Hindus. But the unfortunate part is that my opinion in this respect coincides with the opinion of Mr. Gandhi's best friend. I will cite the opinions of two. This is what Mr. Ewer, who was closely associated with Mr. Gandhi during the Round Table Conference, wrote about the role Mr. Gandhi played at the Round Table Conference in London.

"Gandhi in the St. James' Palace has not fulfilled the unwise expectation of those who saw him bestriding the Conference like a colossus

.....He was out of his elements."

* * *

"His first speech, with its sentimental appeal, its over-stressing of humility, its reiteration of single-minded concern for the dumb suffering millions, was a failure. No one questioned its sincerity. But somehow it rang false. It was the right thing, perhaps, but it was in the wrong place. Nor were his later interventions on the whole more successful. A rather querulous complaint that the British Government had not produced a plan for the new Indian Constitution shocked some of Gandhi's colleagues, who had hardly expected to see the representative of the National Congress appealing to British Ministers for guidance and initiative. The protest against the pegging of the rupee to the pound was

astonishingly ineffective. The contributions to the discussions on franchise and kindred matters were of little importance. Behind the scenes he was active enough in the Hindu-Moslem negotiations, but here, too, results were intangible. Not for a moment did Gandhi take the lead or materially influence the course of committee work. He sat there, sometimes speaking, sometimes silent, while the work went on, much as it would have gone on without him.”¹

This is what Bolton has to say about Mr. Gandhi’s achievement at the Round Table Conference.

How did Mr. Gandhi fare as a statesman and a politician?

At the close of the first session of the Round Table Conference there were three questions which had not been settled. The question of minorities, the question of the Federal structure and the question of the status of India in the Empire, were the three outstanding problems which were the subject matter of controversy. Their solution demanded great statesmanship. Many said that these questions were not settled because the wisdom and authority of the Congress was not represented at the Round Table Conference. At the second session, Mr. Gandhi came and made good the deficiency. Did Mr. Gandhi settle any of these unsettled problems? I think it is not unfair to say that Mr. Gandhi created fresh disunity in the Conference. He began the childish game of ridiculing every Indian delegate. He questioned their honesty, he questioned their representative character. He taunted the liberals as arm-chair politicians and as leaders without any followers. To the Muslims he said that he represented the Muslim masses better than they did. He claimed that the Depressed Class delegates did not represent the Depressed Classes and that he did. This was the refrain which he repeated *ad nauseum* at the end of every speech. The non-Congress delegates deserve the thanks of all honest people for their having tolerated this nonsense and arrogance of Mr. Gandhi and collaborated with him to save him and to save the country from his mistake. Apart from this discourtesy to fellow-delegates, did Mr. Gandhi stand up for the cause he came to champion? He did not. His conduct of affairs was ignominious. Instead of standing up and fighting he began to yield on issues on which he ought never to have ceased fire. He yielded to the Princes and agreed that their representatives in the Federal legislature should be nominated by them and not elected, as demanded by their subjects. He yielded to the conservatives and consented to be content with provincial autonomy and not to insist upon central responsibility for which many lakhs of Indians went to gaol. The only people to whom he would not yield

¹ “Gandhi in London” — Asia, February 1932.

were the minorities — the only party to whom he could have yielded with honour to himself and advantage to the country.

Nothing has helped so much to shatter the prestige of Mr. Gandhi as going to the Round Table Conference. The spectacle of Mr. Gandhi at the Round Table Conference must have been painful to many of his friends. He was not fitted to play the role he undertook to play. No country has ever sent a delegate to take part in the framing of the constitution who was so completely unequipped in training and in study. Gandhi went to the Round Table Conference with a song of the saint Narsi Mehta on his tongue. It would have been better for him and better for his country if he had taken in his arm pit a volume on comparative constitutional law. Devoid of any knowledge of the subject he was called upon to deal with, he was quite powerless to destroy the proposals put forth by the British or to meet them with his alternatives. No wonder Mr. Gandhi, taken out of the circle of his devotees and placed among politicians, was at sea. At every turn he bungled and finding that he could not even muddle through, he gave up the game and returned to India.

How was Mr. Gandhi received when he landed on the Indian soil? It may sound strange to outsiders and to those who are not the devotees of Mr. Gandhi but it is a fact that when the *S. S. Pilsner* of the Lloyd Triestino entered the harbour of Bombay at 8 a.m. in the morning of the 28th December 1931 there came to receive him an enthusiastic crowd of men, women and children who had assembled at the Pier in tens of thousands to greet him, to welcome him back and to have his *Durshan*. The following extracts from the *Times of India* and the *Evening News* of Bombay will serve to give a vivid idea of the grandeur of this reception.

“The Pilsner was escorted into the harbour by Desh Sevikas (women volunteers of the Congress) in saffron coloured sarees who went out in launches some distance from the pier.

“The Congress Committee had asked the Bombay Flying Club to fly an Aeroplane or two over the Pilsner and drop garlands as she came along side the pier, but the Flying Club, sanely preferring to keep out of politics, refused to grant the Congress demand.

“The spacious Central Hall at Ballard Pier was decorated with festoons and Congress flags and a large dais was put up at the centre with chairs placed on all sides for representatives of various organizations, local and upcountry, who were given passes for admission.

“Both the approaches to the reception hall from the wharf and from the city were lined by Desh Sevikas waving national flags and the duty of guarding the dais and of regulating and directing the assembly inside the hall was also entrusted to the women volunteers.

“Mr. Gandhi reached the dais escorted by the Congress leaders and received an ovation. Hardly had he stepped on the dais when he began to be flooded with telegraph messages (presumably of welcome) which arrived one after another.

“Standing on the dais he was garlanded in turn by representatives of the public bodies who had assembled and whose names were called out from a long printed list of which copies were previously distributed.

“The proceedings inside the reception hall terminated with the garlanding.

“A procession was then formed in four, in place of the carriage which was intended to be the conveyance for Mr. Gandhi. He was seated in a gaily decorated motor car, with Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel to his left and Mr. Vitthalbhai Patel to his right and Mr. K. F. Nariman, President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, on the front seat.

“Preceded by a pilot car and followed by others containing the Congress Working Committee members, the procession passed through the Ballard Pier Road, Hornby Road and Kalbadevi which had been decorated by the citizens at the instance of the Congress Committee and lined on either side by cheering crowds, five to ten deep till the party reached “*Mani Bhuvan, Gamdevi*”.

At no stage of this welcome did Mr. Gandhi open his lips to acknowledge it. This man of vows was under his Sunday vow of silence which had not run out till then and nor did he think that etiquette, good manners or respect for those who had assembled required that he should terminate his vow earlier.

The official historian of the Congress describes¹ this reception given to Mr. Gandhi in the following terms:

“There were gathered in Bombay representatives of all parts and Provinces in India to accord a fitting welcome to the Tribune of the people. Gandhi greeted the friends that went on board the steamer to welcome him, patting many, thumping a few and pulling the venerable Abbas Tyabji by his beard. There was a formal welcome in one of the Halls of Customs House and then a procession in the streets of Bombay which kings might envy in their own country”.

¹ Pattabhi Sitaramayya — History of the Congress, p. 857.

On reading this account one is reminded of the Irish Sein Fein Delegates who in 1921, just 10 years before, had gone to London at the invitation of Mr. Lloyd George for the settlement of the Irish Home Rule question. As is well known the Irish Delegates secured from the British Cabinet a treaty which was signed on the 8th December 1921. The Treaty was subsequently submitted for approval to the Dail, the Parliament of the Sein Fein Party which met from 14th December 1921 to 7th January 1922. On the 7th January a division was taken. There were 64 votes for ratifying the treaty and 57 against. And what was the reception given to the Irish delegates who secured this treaty? Arthur Griffith — who was the head of the Irish Delegation and Michael Collins who was his most prominent colleague, were both of them shot by the anti-treaty Sein Feiners, the former on the 12th and the latter on the 22nd August 1922. The reason for sending them to such cruel death was that the treaty which they signed did not secure the inclusion of Ulster and a republic for Ireland. It is true the treaty did not grant this. But if it is remembered that negotiations were opened on the express understanding on the part of both sides that these two questions were outside the scope of negotiations it will be granted that if the treaty did not include these it was no fault of the Irish Delegates. The fury and ferocity of the anti treaty Sein Feiners against the Irish Delegates had no moral foundation and the fate that befell Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins can by no stretch of imagination be said to be one which they deserved.

Be that as it may, this welcome to Mr. Gandhi will be regarded as a very strange event. Both went to win Swaraj, Griffith and Collins for Ireland, Gandhi for India, Griffith and Collins succeeded, almost triumphed; Gandhi failed and returned with nothing but defeat and humiliation. Yet Collins and Griffith were shot and Gandhi was given a reception which kings could have envied !! What a glaring and a cruel contrast between the fate that awaited Collins and Griffith and the reception arranged for Gandhi? Are the Indian Patriots different from the Irish Patriots? Did the masses render this welcome out of blind devotion or were they kept in darkness of the failure of Mr. Gandhi by a mercenary Press? This is more than I can answer.¹

II

While this great welcome was being accorded to Mr. Gandhi the Untouchables of Bombay had come to the Pier to repudiate

¹ The official historian of the Congress perhaps realizing that this welcome to Mr. Gandhi on the ground of his political achievement says—(Sitaramayya's statement not given in the Ms. —Ed.).

Mr. Gandhi. Referring to this demonstration, the newspaper reports said:

“Just outside the gate of Ballard Pier, the scene was most exciting. On one side were drawn up Depressed Class volunteers in uniform, weaving black flags to the accompaniment of derisive shouts against Mr. Gandhi and laudatory cries in praise of their leader, while on the other side Congress followers kept up a din of counter shouts.”

This Untouchable demonstration included men and women. The demonstrators numbered thousands, all waving Black Flags as a mark of repudiation of Mr. Gandhi. They were a determined crowd and, despite intimidation by the superior forces of the Congress assembled there to welcome Mr. Gandhi, were bent on showing that they repudiated Mr. Gandhi. This led to a clash and blood was split. There were forty casualties on each side.

For the first time Mr. Gandhi was made aware that there could be black flags even against him. This must have come to him as a shock. When he was asked about it later in the day, he said he was not angry, the Untouchables being the flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. This is of course the Mahatmaic way of concealing the truth. One would not mind this convenient and conventional lie if there were behind it a realization that the crowd could not always be trusted to be loyal to its hero. Congressmen in India sadly lack the realism of a man like Cromwell. It is related that when Cromwell returned after a great battle, an enormous crowd came out to greet him. A friend sought to impress upon him the immensity of the crowd. But Cromwell dismissed the subject with the laconic remark: “Oh yes, I know many more will come to see me hanged.”!! No Congress leader feels the realism of Cromwell. Either he believes that the day will never come when he will be hanged or he believes that the Indian crowd will never become a thinking crowd. That part of the Indian crowd does think was shown by the representatives of the Untouchables who assembled on the 28th to greet Mr. Gandhi with black flags.

Why did the Untouchables repudiate Mr. Gandhi? The answer to this question will be found in a statement issued by the organizers of these demonstrations which was printed and circulated on that day. The following are extracts from it.

“Our Charge sheet against Gandhiji and Congress”

“Enough of patronising attitude and lip sympathy. We ask for justice and fair play.”

1. In spite of the fact that the removal of untouchability has been included in the constructive programme of the Congress,

- practically nothing has so far been done by that body to achieve that object, and in our fights against untouchability at Mahad and Nasik most of the local Congress leaders have been our bitter opponents.
2. The attitude of Gandhiji at the Round Table Conference in London with regard to the demands of the Depressed Classes as put forward by their accredited and trusted leader Dr. Ambedkar, was most unreasonable, obstinate and inexplicable.
 3. Gandhiji was prepared to concede on behalf of the Congress the special claims of the Mohamedans and the Sikhs including their demand for separate representation on "historic grounds", but he was not willing even to concede reserved seats in general electorates to the Depressed Classes, although he knew, or should have known, what sort of treatment they would get, should they be thrown upon at the mercy on caste Hindus.

*

*

*

*

*

9. Gandhiji has said in opposing the claims of the Depressed Classes for separate representation that he does not want the Hindu Community to be subjected to vivisection or dissection. But the Congress is now dissecting the community of Untouchables by playing one section against another. Gandhiji and the Congress are not playing the fair game. Open enemies are far better than treacherous friends.

10. Attempts are being made to show that Gandhiji and the Congress alone represent the Depressed Classes by presenting addresses through a handful of hirelings and dupes. Is it not our duty to demonstrate the fact by coming out in thousands and proclaiming the truth? This is our charge sheet against Gandhiji and the Congress.

Let those who are not blind hero worshippers and blind partisans judge and give their verdict.

General Secretary,
Depressed Classes Institute.

III

Is this charge sheet true? Mr. Gandhi is known to the world not merely as the Political leader of India, but also as the Champion of the Untouchables. It is perhaps true that the outside world takes more interest in Mr. Gandhi because he is the champion of the Untouchables than because he is a political leader. For instance the Manchester Guardian very recently devoted an editorial to the work of Mr. Gandhi for the Untouchables.

In the face of this, the charge appears to be quite unfounded. For, has not Mr. Gandhi made the Congress pledge itself to remove

untouchability? The Congress before it came into the hands of Mr. Gandhi had refused to allow any social problem to be placed before it for consideration. A clear cut distinction was made between political and social question, and scrupulous attempt was made to confine the deliberations and activities of the Congress to purely political questions. The old Congress refused to take notice of the Untouchables. It was with great difficulty that the Congress in 1917* for the first time allowed the question of the Untouchables to be placed before it and condescended to pass the following resolution:

“The Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes, the disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppresssive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience.”¹

The Congress fell onto the hands of Mr. Gandhi in 1920 and the Congress at its ordinary session held at Nagpur passed the following resolution :

INTERCOMMUNAL UNITY

“Finally, in order that the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs may be redressed and Swarajya established within one year, this Congress urges upon all public bodies, whether affiliated to the Congress or otherwise, to devote their exclusive attention to the promotion of non-violence and non-cooperation with the Government and, inasmuch as the movement of non-cooperation can only succeed by complete co-operation amongst the people themselves, this Congress calls upon public associations to advance Hindu-Muslim unity and the Hindu delegates of this Congress call upon the leading Hindus to settle all disputes between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins, wherever they may be existing, and to make a special effort to rid Hinduism of the reproach of untouchability, and respectfully urges the religious heads to help the growing desire to reform Hinduism in the matter of its treatment of the suppressed classes.”

Again did not Mr. Gandhi make the removal of untouchability a condition precedent for achieving Swaraj? In the *Young India* of December 29, 1920, Mr. Gandhi wrote:

“Non-cooperation against the Government means cooperation among the governed, and if Hindus do not remove the sin of

* Year not mentioned in the Ms.—Ed.

¹ This quotation has been reproduced from page I of ‘What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables’ by the author. This was not typed in the MS of this essay.—Ed.

untouchability, there will be no Swaraj in one year or one hundred years....”

Writing again on the conditions of Swaraj in the issue of *Young India* for February 23, 1921, he said:

“Swaraj is easy of attainment before October next if certain simple conditions can be fulfilled. I ventured to mention one year in September last because I knew that the conditions were incredibly simple and I felt that the atmosphere in the country was responsive. The past five months experience has confirmed me in the opinion. I am convinced that the country has never been so ready for establishing Swaraj as now.”

“But what is necessary for us as accurately as possible to know the conditions. One supreme indispensable condition is the continuance of non-violence.”

“The next condition is..... establishing a Congress Agency in every village.”

“There are certain things that are applicable to all. The potent thing is Swadeshi. Every home must have the spinning wheel and every village can organize.... and become self supporting.”

“Every man and woman can give some money—be it even a pice—to the Tilak Swaraja Fund. And we need have no anxiety about financing the movement.....”

“We can do nothing without Hindu-Moslem unity and without killing the snake of untouchability.....”

“Have we honest, earnest, industrious, patriotic workers for this very simple programme? If we have, Swaraj will be established in India before next October.”

What more did the Untouchables want? Here is Mr. Gandhi who had held himself out as the friend of the Untouchables. He prides himself on being their servant. He claims and fought for being accepted as their representative. Why should the Untouchables show such a lack of confidence in Mr. Gandhi?

On the basis of words, the charge perhaps appears unfounded. But does it appear equally unfounded if we have regard to deeds? Let me examine Mr. Gandhi's deeds.

The work which is claimed by Mr. Gandhi and his friends to have been done by him and the Congress for the Untouchables falls into two periods, the period which precedes the Poona Pact and the period which follows the Poona Pact. The first period may be called the period of the Bardoli Programme. The second period may be called the period of the Harijan Sevak Sangh.

FIRST PERIOD

I

To begin with the Bardoli Programme period. The Bardoli Programme or what is called the Constructive Programme of the Congress was the direct outcome of the new line of action adopted by the Congress in securing the political demands of the country. At the session of the Congress held at Nagpur in 1920 the Congress declared :

“Whereas the people of India are now determined to establish Swaraj; and

“Whereas all methods adopted by the people of India prior to the last special session of the Indian National Congress have failed to secure due recognition of their rights and liberties;

“Now this Congress while reaffirming the resolution on non-violent non-cooperation passed at the Special Session of the Congress at Calcutta declares that the entire or any part or parts of the scheme of non-violent non-cooperation, with the renunciation of voluntary association with the present Government at one end and the refusal to pay taxes at the other, should be put in force at a time to be determined by either the Indian National Congress or the All India Congress Committee and in the meanwhile to prepare the Country for it”,....

At the session of the Congress held at Ahmedabad in 1921 it was declared that:

“This Congress is further of opinion that Civil Disobedience is the only civilized and effective substitute for an armed rebellion.... and therefore advises all Congress Workers and others.... to organize individual civil disobedience and mass civil disobedience”.....

It is to give effect to this policy of non-cooperation and civil disobedience and to prepare the people to take part in them that the Working Committee of the Congress met at Bardoli in February 1922 and drew up the following programme of action.

“The Working Committee advises all Congress organisations to be engaged in the following activities :

- (1) To enlist at least one crore of members of the Congress.
- (2) To popularise the spinning wheel and to organise the manufacture of hand-spun and handwoven khaddar.
- (3) To organise national schools.
- (4) To organise the Depressed Classes for a better life, to improve their social, mental and moral condition to induce them

to send their children to national schools and to provide for them the ordinary facilities which the other citizens enjoy.

Note : Whilst therefore where the prejudice against the Untouchables is still strong in places, separate schools and separate wells must be maintained out of Congress funds, every effort should be made to draw such children to national schools and to persuade the people to allow the Untouchables to use the common wells.

- (5) To organise the temperance campaign amongst the people addicted to the drink habit by house-to-house visits and to rely more upon appeal to the drinker in his home than upon picketing.
- (6) To organise village and town Panchayats for the private settlement of all disputes, reliance being placed solely upon the force of public opinion and the truthfulness of Panchayat decisions to ensure obedience to them.
- (7) In order to promote and emphasize unity among all classes and races and mutual goodwill, the establishment of which is the aim of the movement of non-cooperation, to organise a social service department that will render help to all, irrespective of differences, in times of illness or accident.
- (8) To continue the Tilak Memorial Swaraj Fund collections and call upon every Congressman or Congress sympathiser to pay at least a one-hundredth part of his annual income for 1921. Every province to send every month twenty-five per cent of its income from the Tilak Memorial Swaraj Fund to the All-India Congress Committee.

The above resolution shall be brought before the forthcoming session of the All-India Congress Committee for revision if necessary."

This programme was placed before the All-India Congress Committee at its meeting at Delhi on 20th February 1922 and was confirmed by the same. The programme is a very extensive programme and I am not concerned with what happened to the whole of it, how it was received and how it was worked out. I am concerned with only one item and that which relates to the Depressed Classes.

After it was confirmed by the All-India Congress Committee, the Working Committee met at Lucknow in June 1922 and passed the following resolution :

"This Committee hereby appoints a committee consisting of Swami Shraddhanandji, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Messrs. I. K. Yajnik and G. B. Deshpande to formulate a scheme embodying practical measures to be adopted for bettering the condition of the

so-called Untouchables throughout the country and to place it for consideration before the next meeting of this Committee, the amount to be raised for the scheme to be Rs. 2 lacs for the present.”

This resolution was placed before the All-India Congress Committee at its meeting in Lucknow in June 1922. It accepted the resolution with the amendment that “the amount to be raised for the scheme should be 5 lacs for the present”, instead of 2 lacs as put forth in the resolution of the Working Committee. How did this programme fare, what practical measures did the Committee suggest and how far were these measures given effect to? These questions one must ask in order to assess the work of Mr. Gandhi and the Congress for the Untouchables.

It seems that before the resolution appointing the Committee was adopted by the Working Committee, one of its Members Swami Shradhanand tendered his resignation of the membership of the Committee. For one finds that at the very sitting at which the Working Committee passed this resolution, another resolution to the following effect was passed by the Working Committee :

“Read letter from Swami Shradhanandji, dated 8th June 1922 for an advance for drawing up a scheme for depressed classes work. Resolved that Mr. Gangadharrao B. Deshpande be appointed convener of the sub-committee appointed for the purpose and he be requested to convene a meeting at an early date, and that Swami Shradhanand’s letter be referred to the sub-committee.”

The Working Committee met again in July 1922 in Bombay and passed the following Resolution :

“That the General Secretary be asked to request Swami Shradhanand to reconsider his resignation and withdraw it and a sum of Rs. 500/- be remitted to the Convener, Shri G. B. Deshpande, for the contingent expenses of the Depressed Classes Sub-Committee.”

The year 1922 thus passed away without anything being done to further that item of the Bardoli Programme which related to the Depressed Classes. The year 1923 came on. The Working Committee met at Gaya in January 1923 and passed the following resolution :

“With reference to Swami Shradhanand’s resignation, resolved that the remaining members of the Depressed Classes Sub-Committee do form the Committee and Mr. Yajnik be the convener.”

The All-India Congress Committee met in Feb. 1923 at Bombay and seeing that nothing was done as yet, recorded the following resolution :

“Resolved that the question of the condition of the Untouchables be referred to the Working Committee for necessary action.”

What did the Working Committee do then? It met at Poona on the 17th April 1923 and resolved as follows:

“Resolved that while some improvement has been effected in the treatment of the so-called Untouchables in response to the policy of the Congress this Committee is conscious that much work remains yet to be done in this respect and inasmuch as this question of untouchability concerns the Hindu community particularly, it requests the All-India Hindu Mahasabha also to take up this matter and to make strenuous efforts to remove this evil from amidst the Hindu community.”

Thus came to an end the Constructive Programme undertaken by Mr. Gandhi and the Congress for the Untouchables. The Bardoli programme for the Untouchables was in no sense a revolutionary programme. It did attempt to abolish untouchability. It does not attempt to break up caste. There is no mention of intermarriage or interdinning. It accepts the principle of separate wells and separate schools for Untouchables. It was purely an ameliorative programme. And yet such a harmless programme the Congress failed to carry through.

It must further be remembered that this was a time when the Congress was on the war path. It was determined to fight British Imperialism and was most anxious to draw every community towards itself and make all disaffected towards the British. This was the time when the Congress could have been expected to show to the Untouchables that the Congress stood for them and was prepared to serve them in the same way that it was prepared to serve the Musalmans. There could be no more propitious circumstance which could make the Hindus overcome their antipaty towards the Untouchables and undertake to serve. But even such propitious circumstance did not prove sufficient to energize Congressmen to do this small bit for the Untouchables. How hard must be the anti-social feelings of the Hindus against the Untouchables that even the highest bliss and the greatest stimulant, namely the prospect of winning, Swaraj, were not sufficient to dissolve that spirit. The tragedy and the shamelessness of this failure by the Congress to carry through their programme for the Untouchables is aggravated by the way in which the matter was disposed of.

The work of the amelioration of the Untouchables could not have been left in worse hands. If there is any body which is quite unfit for addressing itself to the problem of the Untouchables, it is the Hindu Mahasabha. It is a militant Hindu organization. Its aim and object is to conserve in every way everything that is Hindu, religious and

culture. It is not a social reform association. It is a purely political organization whose main object and aim is to combat the influence of the Muslims in Indian politics. Just to preserve its political strength it wants to maintain its social solidarity and its way to maintain social solidarity is not to talk about caste or untouchability. How such a body could have been selected by the Congress for carrying on the work of the Untouchables passes my comprehension. This shows that the Congress wanted somehow to get rid of an inconvenient problem and wash its hands of it. The Hindu Mahasabha, of course, did not come forth to undertake the work and the Congress had merely passed a pious resolution recommending the work to them without making any promise for financial provision. So the project came to an inglorious and ignominious end. Yet there will not be wanting thousands of Congressmen who would not be ashamed to boast that the Congress has been fighting for the cause of the Untouchables and what is worse is that there will not be wanting hundreds of foreigners who are ready to believe it under the false propaganda carried on by men like Charles F. Andrews, who is the friend of Mr. Gandhi and who thinks that to popularize Gandhi in the Western World is his real mission in life.¹

It is not enough to know that the effort failed and had to be wound up. It is necessary to inquire why Swami Shradhanand resigned and refused to serve on the proposed Committee. There must be some good reason for it. For the Swami was the most enlightened Arya Samajist and very conscientiously believed in the removal of untouchability. On this point, the correspondence that passed between the Swami and the General Secretary to the All India Congress Committee throws a flood of light on the mentality of the Congressmen and I make no apology for reproducing below the whole of it.

SWAMIJI'S LETTER

The General Secretary,
All-India Congress Committee,
Camp Delhi.

I acknowledge, with thanks, receipt of your letters No. 331 and 332 embodying resolutions of the working committee and of the A.I.C.C. about untouchability. I observe with pain, that the resolution of the A.I.C.C. as at present worded, does not include the whole of what was passed by the committee.

¹ Mr. Andrews once went to the length of defending the Caste system.

The facts are these. I sent the following letter to Mr. Vithalbhai Patel, the then General Secretary on 23rd May 1922, which was also published by the principal dailies of the country.

“My dear Mr. Patel, there was a time (vide *Young India* of 25th May, 1921) when Mahatmaji put the question of untouchability in the forefront of the Congress Programme. I find now that the question of raising the Depressed Classes has been relegated to an obscure corner. While Khadi claims the attention of some of our best workers and liberal sum has been earmarked for it, for the year, while a strong sub-committee has been appointed to look after national education and a special appeal for funds is to be made for the same, the question of the removal of untouchability has been shelved by making small grants to Ahmedabad, Ahmednagar and Madras. I am of opinion that with a majority of 6 crores of our brethren set against us by the beauracracy even the Khadi Scheme cannot succeed completely. The Members of the Working Committee, perhaps, do not know that on this side our suppressed brethren are leaving off Khadi and taking to buying cheap foreign cloth. I want to move the following resolution in the meeting of the A.I.C.C, which comes off on the 7th of June next at Lucknow.

“That a Sub-committee, consisting of three members of the A.I.C.C, be appointed to give effect to the resolution about the so-called Depressed Classes, that a sum of five Lakhs of rupees be placed at their disposal for propaganda work and that in future all applications for grants be referred to the said Sub-committee for disposal.”

My proposal was amended by the Working Committee and ran as follows :

“This Committee hereby appoints a committee consisting of Swami Shradhanand, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Messrs. G. B. Deshpande and I. K. Yajnik to formulate a scheme embodying practical measures to be adopted for bettering the condition of the so-called Untouchables throughout the country and to place it for consideration before the next meeting of the Working Committee, the amount to be raised for the scheme to be Rs. 2 lakhs for the present.”

Mr. Patel asked me to accept the Working Committee's proposed resolution in toto. I refused to accept the Working Committee's resolution and in the very first sitting of the All India Congress Committee substituted 5 lakhs for 2 lakhs with the condition that one lakh of the same be allotted by the A.I.C.C, out of the funds in its hands, in cash and an appeal be made for the balance.

Mr. Rajagopalachariar, on behalf of the Working Committee proposed that instead of fixing the amount to be allotted out of the

Congress funds now, it should be provided that when the Scheme was accepted by the Working Committee, that Committee should allot as much cash as it could then spare for this purpose. I do not recollect the exact words but the support of the amendment as given above is, to my knowledge, true.

On this an uproar arose and the query was pressed from all sides that the cash balance in the hands of the A.I.C.C. ought to be announced. The President called me aside and told me in confidence that the Congress possessed very little cash balance and if pressed to disclose the true state of affairs, it would harm the movement as outsiders and even C.I.D. people were also present. On this I accepted the amendment of Mr. Rajgopalchariar in spite of protests from my seconder and supporters. But my surprise was great when I found the resolution in the dailies, as reported by the associated press, shorn of Mr. Rajagopalchariar's amendment.

After the above resolution was passed, some members suggested that a convener of the Sub-committee ought to be appointed, several members proposed me as the convener. On this Mr. Vithalbhai Patel (the then General Secretary) got up and said, "As Swami Shradhanand's name occurs first, naturally he will be the convener and therefore there was no need of moving any fresh resolution at all."

Members from all parts of the country began to give information to me about untouchability in their provinces and pressed me to visit their parts. On this I made some promises. Then, I thought, that without some cash for preliminary expenses no enquiries, on the spot could be made and hence no proper scheme formulated. I also learnt that Rs. 25,000/- had been voted by the Working Committee for "*the Independent*" of Allahabad and that an application for grant of Rs. 10,000/- to the Urdu daily "*Congress*" of Delhi had been placed by Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr. Ansari before the Working Committee. So, considering, that after all, the Congress might not be so hard pressed for cash, I wrote a letter addressed to the President asking him to give the Untouchability Sub-Committee an advance of Rs. 10,000/- for preliminary expenses.

After all this, the following resolution of the Working Committee forwarded by your letter No. 331 is very interesting reading:

"Read letter from Swami Shradhanand dated 8th June 1922 for an advance for drawing up a scheme for Depressed Class work—Resolved that Mr. Gangadharrao B. Deshpande be appointed convener of the Sub-committee appointed for the purpose and he be requested to convene a meeting at an early date, and that Swami Shradhanand's letter be referred to the Sub-committee."

There is another matter which is inexplicable. After my first letter had been acknowledged I addressed the following letter from Hardwar on 3rd June 1922 :

“My dear Mr. Patel, I shall leave Hardwar the day after tomorrow and reach Lucknow on the morning of June 6th. You know, by now, that I feel the most for the so-called Depressed Classes. Even in the Punjab I find that no attention worth the name has been paid to this item of the constructive programme. In the U.P. of course it will be an uphill work. But there is another very serious difficulty.

The Bardoli programme, in its note under item 4, lays down that where prejudice is still strong, separate wells and separate schools must be maintained out of the Congress funds. This leaves a loophole for those Congress workers who are either prejudiced against the Depressed Classes or are weak, and no work can be done in inducing people to agree to allow the Untouchables to draw water from common wells. In the Bijnoor District, I learn, there was no restriction and the Untouchables drew water freely from common wells. But in some places fresh prejudice is being engendered under the aegis of the Bardoli resolution note. In my recent visits to Ambala Cantt., Ludhiana, Batala, Lahore, Amritsar and Jandiala, I found that the question of the removal of disabilities of the Untouchables is being ignored. In and near Delhi it is the Dalitodhar Sabha, of which I am the President, rather than the Congress which is doing appreciable work. I think that unless item (4) of the Bardoli constructive programme is amended in proper form, the work, which I consider to be the most important plank in the Congress programme, will suffer.

Kindly place the following proposal before the President and if he allows it to be placed before the next meeting of the A.I.C.C. I shall move it there—“Instead of the Note under item (4) of the Bardoli resolution, substitute the following Note : “The following demands of the Depressed Classes ought to be complied with at once namely that (a) they are allowed to sit on the same carpet with citizens of other classes, (b) they get the right to draw water from common wells and (c) their children get admission into National schools and Colleges and are allowed to mix freely with students drawn from the so-called higher castes. I want to impress upon the members of the A.I.C.C. the great importance of this item. I know of cases where the Depressed Classes are in open revolt against tyranny of the so-called upper castes and unless the above demands are conceded to them they will succumb to the machinations of the bureaucracy.” After my first proposals were passed in the A.I.C.C. Meeting on June 7th at Lucknow, I asked Mr. Patel to put my proposed amendmant of Note to item (4) of

Bardoli resolution before the meeting. He told me that the Working Committee would refer it to the Sub-committee and asked me not to press it there. I agreed. But I have not received copy of any resolution of the Working Committee referring my proposal to the Untouchability Sub-committee.

The untouchability question is very acute in and near Delhi and I have to grapple with it at once. But the Sub-committee cannot begin work off-hand because the Working Committee has to take several other political situations in the country into consideration before deciding upon any scheme of practical measures to be adopted for uprooting untouchability on behalf of the Congress. Under these circumstances I cannot be of any use to the Sub-committee and beg to resign from membership.

Delhi, Jan. 30.

Yours sincerely,
Shradhanand Sanyasi.

SECRETARY'S REPLY

Dear Swamiji,

Your letter dated June 1922 received in my office on the 30th of that month has, by a resolution of the Working Committee passed in Bombay on the 18th instant, been referred to me with instructions to explain facts and request you to be good enough to reconsider your resignation from the Depressed Classes Sub-Committee.

As you are aware, I have no personal knowledge of the facts which happened prior to my release from the jail. But I was present at the meeting of the Working Committee which passed the resolution dated 10th June 1922 appointing Mr. Deshpande as the Convener of the Sub-committee. It was not then mentioned that there was any understanding about any particular member acting as the Convener of the Sub-committee and the whole resolution was passed merely to complete the necessary formalities in regard to the payment of money. It was felt that a formal resolution of the Sub-committee was necessary before any expenditure could be sanctioned. Mr. Deshpande was accordingly appointed as the convener and a sum of Rs. 500/- was voted for the expenses of these preliminary steps. By an oversight the resolution as drafted omitted to mention the sanction of Rs. 500/-. You will thus observe that it was not due to the unwillingness of Working Committee to sanction Rs. 10,000/- for untouchability, but the true reason for framing the resolution in the manner it was framed was what I have explained above. Nothing could be farther from the intention of the Working Committee than a desire to understand the

importance of the work your Sub-committee was called upon to do or in any way to ignore the valuable advice tendered by you. On your letter being placed before the last meeting of the Working Committee the omission of the grant of Rs. 500/- was supplied, and I was instructed to communicate with you on the subject. It will be a great pity if the Sub-committee is deprived of the benefit of your experience and special knowledge of the whole question of untouchability and I will ask you therefore in the public interest to reconsider your decision and wire to my office at Allahabad withdrawing your resignation from the Sub-Committee. I need hardly add that any resolutions arrived at by your Sub-Committee will receive all the consideration they deserve at the hands of the Working Committee.

As to the alteration in the Working Committee's resolution in regard to separate wells and schools, the best course would be for your Sub-Committee to recommend the change and for the Working Committee to adopt it.

I am afraid you are under a misapprehension as regards the grant to '*The Independent*', of Allahabad, and "*The Congress*" of Delhi. In reference to the former, all that has been done is to sanction the application of the U. P. Provincial Committee to advance as a loan to the "*nationalist journals*" Ltd., Rs. 25,000 from the funds already granted to that committee and in reference to the latter, the application for a grant of a loan was wholly rejected.

Yours sincerely,
Motilal Nehru.
General Secretary.

Bombay, July 23, 1922.

SWAMIJI'S REJOINDER

Dear Pandit Motilalji,

I received your letter of 23rd July 1922 addressed from Bombay on my resignation from the Untouchability Sub-Committee. I am sorry I am unable to reconsider it because some of the facts brought out by me in my first letter have simply been ignored.

(1) Kindly enquire of Mr. Rajagopalchariar whether I did not first propose that at least one lakh should be given in cash out of the funds in the hands of the A.I.C.C, whether he did not move an amendment substituting words for the above which purported to promise that when the plan of work formulated by the Sub-Committee was accepted by the Working Committee, that Committee would allot as much money for the untouchability department as it could then spare

and whether I did not accept his amendment when the President called me aside and explained the exact financial position at the time. If this is the fact then why did the amendment not appear with the resolution?

(2) Did you enquire of Mr. Vithalbhai J. Patel whether the members of the A.I.C.C. did not propose me as the convener of the Sub-Committee and whether he did not then say — “As Swami Shradhanand’s name occurs first, naturally he will be the convener and therefore there was no need of moving any fresh resolution at all” I enquired about this from Dr. Ansari and he wrote back to me on June 17th, 1922 saying that I was appointed convener. Dr. Ansari is with you and you can verify it from him. I hope Mr. Patel has not forgotten all about it.

(3) Then the immediate work among the Untouchables here is very urgent and I can not delay it for any reason whatever. Kindly have my resignation accepted in the next meeting of the Working Committee, so that I may be free to work out my own plan about the removal of untouchability. This was my position at the end of July last. My experience in the Amritsar and Mianwali jails and the information I gathered there, have confirmed me in the belief that unless sexual purity (Brahmacharya) is revived on the ancient Aryan lines and the curse of untouchability is blotted out of the Indian society, no efforts of the Congress nor of other patriotic organisations out of the Congress will avail in their efforts for the attainment of Swaraj. And as national self realization and virile existence is impossible without Swaraj, I, as a Sanyasi, should devote the rest of my life to this sacred cause—the cause of sexual purity and true national unity.

Delhi, July 23, 1922.

Shradhananda Sanyasi.

This shows what heart Congressmen had in the uplift work of the Untouchables.

2

So much for what Congressmen volunteered to do. How much did congressmen or Mr. Gandhi help the Untouchables who were working independently for the uplift of their own people. This was the period when the Untouchables themselves were on the warpath. They too were engaged in offering civil disobedience against the Hindus for the purpose of acquiring their civic and social rights. This was the period during which the Untouchables of Bombay Presidency had launched their Satyagraha at Mahad for establishing their right to take water

from the public tank and at Nasik for establishing their right to enter a Hindu temple. How did Mr. Gandhi look upon this Satyagraha movement started by the Untouchables against the caste Hindus? The attitude of Mr. Gandhi to say the least was extremely queer.

In the first place Mr. Gandhi condemned this Satyagraha by the Untouchables against the caste Hindus. He would not support it. In this controversy the Untouchables were perfectly logical. They argued that if Civil Disobedience was the weapon which, according to Mr. Gandhi, the Hindus could legitimately use against the British for securing their freedom, why were the Untouchables not justified in using the same weapon against the caste Hindus for securing their emancipation. However good this logic Mr. Gandhi would have none of it. He tried to meet their logic by his logic. He argued that Untouchability was the sin of the Hindus. It is the Hindus who must therefore do penance. It is they who must offer Satyagraha for the removal of untouchability. Satyagraha was not the business of the Untouchables because they were not sinners, far from being sinners they were sinned against. This was of course not Aristotelian logic. It is a Mahatmian logic which is another name for casuistry. But it was apparent that this Mahatmian logic was simply nonsense. The Untouchables replied that if that was the view of Mr. Gandhi—namely that Satyagraha is penance which is for the sinner to offer—then why should he call upon the Hindus to offer Satyagraha against the British. British Imperialism was the sin of the British and therefore according to his logic the Satyagraha must be offered by the British and not by the caste Hindus. The Untouchables had destroyed his logic. It was clear that there was either a fallacy or insincerity in this attitude of Mr. Gandhi to Satyagraha by the Untouchables against caste Hindus. But the Untouchables could not dislodge Mr. Gandhi from the position of hostility which he had adopted.

There is another inconsistency in the attitude which Mr. Gandhi showed towards the Satyagraha by the Untouchables against Caste Hindus at Mahad and Nasik and the attitude he showed against similar Satyagraha by the Untouchables at Vaikom. Mr. Gandhi was in favour of the Satyagraha at Vaikom. He blessed it and encouraged it. Why then was Mr. Gandhi opposed to the Satyagraha at Mahad and Nasik? Was there any difference between the two? Yes, there was. The Vaikom Satyagraha was carried on by the Untouchables under the auspices of the Congress. The other two were launched by the Untouchables independently of the Congress. Had the opposition of Mr. Gandhi something to do with this difference? As Mr. Gandhi has given no answer I must leave the reader to make the best guess.